

**Annual Report Reveals 1.4 Percent Improvement in Nation's Overall Health  
Since 2002 Edition; Shows 16.9 Percent Improvement Since 1990**

*Minnesota and New Hampshire Tie as Nation's Healthiest States, followed by Utah, Vermont and  
Massachusetts*

**SAN FRANCISCO – November 17, 2003** – Working for a healthier America, the United Health Foundation, together with the American Public Health Association (APHA) and the Partnership for Prevention, today released *America's Health: State Health Rankings 2003* Edition at the APHA's Annual Meeting in San Francisco.

In this year's rankings, Minnesota and New Hampshire are tied as the healthiest states in the country, followed by Utah, Vermont and Massachusetts. Tennessee, Arkansas, South Carolina, Louisiana and Mississippi round out the list as the least healthy states.

"We hope this report mobilizes everyone – individuals, employers, community leaders and public officials – to play an increased role in promoting their own health and protecting the health of their communities. Most of us have multiple opportunities to choose to live healthier lives, help to create healthier work environments, and participate at some level in policy decisions that can lead to healthier communities," stated Dr. William McGuire, chairman of the United Health Foundation board. "It is our hope that this report stimulates people to take advantage of those opportunities and get involved."

In a letter included in the report, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson urged Americans to make improving the nation's health a number one priority and stated that the time is now for us to work together to build a healthier and stronger United States.

*America's Health: State Health Rankings* is a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, yearly analysis of the relative healthiness of the American population using information supplied by sources including the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and Labor and the National Safety Council. A panel of leading public health scholars developed the methodology for the rankings and an independent research group analyzed the data to author the report.

The report incorporates measures that reflect the decisions made by individuals that affect personal health; the community environment that affects the health of individuals and families; and the policy decisions made by public officials that determine the availability of public health and medical care resources. Components including prevalence of smoking, high school graduation rates, infant mortality rate, and support for the public health infrastructure are measured to produce a composite assessment of each state's health.

"One of the most important aspects of this report is the focus on the successes that each state has achieved, regardless of its ranking," explained Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director, APHA. "Our goal is to share these successes, so that we can all learn from each other and realize a healthier America."

Since 1990, the overall healthiness of the nation has improved 16.9 percent. Reasons for this steady increase in health status during the past 14 years include a 36 percent decline in motor vehicle deaths, a 34 percent decrease in infectious disease, a 32 percent decline in infant mortality, and a 24 percent decrease in the prevalence of smoking. Since the release of the 2002 edition of this report, the nation's overall healthiness has improved 1.4 percent. This increase was due in large part to a decline in the rate of infectious disease as well as in the rate of premature death.

John Clymer, president of the Partnership for Prevention, stated, "Health professionals, policy makers and individuals should take note of these improvements in health status, which

demonstrate the success that is possible when we work in partnership to address the major health challenges in our states and our nation.”

Despite these gains, it is important to note that each of our states – and our nation as a whole – has important challenges that require our urgent attention. Among the most important challenges revealed in this year's report is an increase in the uninsured rate from 13.4 percent in 1990 to 15.2 percent in 2003.

According to Dr. Reed Tuckson, vice president, United Health Foundation, “The addition of 2.6 million more uninsured in the past year means that more than 43.6 million Americans are now without some level of health insurance. The unfortunate consequence for far too many of these people is poor health, preventable suffering and premature death. As shown by the health status results in many of our states, we have the ability to address this and other problems. We must simply act.”

## **Methodology**

The School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill continues to organize an independent panel of public health scholars and methodological experts, who determine the individual components and their relative weights that result in this report.

“The methodology and measures used to determine these rankings reflect the most current research regarding the factors that contribute to individual and community health. In addition, the report continues to make use of improvements in statistical measurement and improved data sources,” said Tom Eckstein, principal, Arundel Street Consulting – the research group that authors the rankings.

## **History**

The 2003 edition of the rankings marks the fourteenth annual report about the healthiness of each state's population and of the nation as a whole. In the past 14 years, the report has proven to be an important resource for citizens and communities and has helped to raise awareness of public health issues. With the assistance of the media, it has helped to stimulate discourse regarding the quality of health in communities across the nation. It also has been a valuable tool in assisting public officials and state legislators in their deliberations regarding interventions to improve the quality of health in their states.

## **About United Health Foundation**

The United Health Foundation was established in 1999 as a nonprofit, private foundation. Sponsoring this report is an expression of the United Health Foundation's commitment to providing information in support of the health and medical decisions made by physicians and health professionals, individuals and community leaders that lead to better health outcomes and healthier communities.

The complete report – and more information about the United Health Foundation and its work – is available at [www.unitedhealthfoundation.org](http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org).

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